

# LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

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**Text:** Rom. 8

**Introduction:** I would like to begin with the briefest of outlines for the book of Romans.

### **Outline of Romans:**

- Chapters 1-3:** All Have Sinned
- Chapters 4-6:** Justification by Faith
- Chapters 7-8:** Overcoming Sin
- Chapters 9-11:** God's Purpose for Jews and Gentiles
- Chapters 12-15:** Holy Living
- Chapter 16:** Closing Greetings

In Chapters 1-3, Paul showed that all had sinned. From 3:21 through 4:25, Paul argued that salvation from sin had always been and still was by faith. Chapter 5 elaborates on justification by faith, emphasizing what God has done through Christ to secure our salvation. Chapter 6 exhorts us to live righteously and forbids us to use grace as an excuse to sin. Christians are to live as slaves of righteousness not as slaves of sin. Paul then demonstrated in Chapter 7 that the Law of Moses could not free a person from sin, describing the frustration of struggling against sin. In Chapter 8, this leads him to explain in glorious prose that “the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed us from the law of sin and death” (v. 2) to an extraordinary degree. J. D. Thomas summarizes the first eight chapters thusly: Righteousness Needed, Righteousness Provided and Righteousness Experienced.<sup>1</sup> It is especially Chapter 8 that deals with righteousness experienced.

**Outline of Romans 8:** (NOTE: I have used the lower case “s” for “spirit” in the outline and all notes below unless the text specifies God's Spirit. Let each student of God's Word determine for himself whose spirit is meant.)

### **Verses 1-17:** Life in the spirit

- Verses 1-4:** The law of the spirit liberates from sin and death
- Verses 5-8:** The fleshly mindset versus the spiritual mindset
- Verses 9-11:** The indwelling spirit brings life
- Verses 12-17:** Duties and blessings of being led by the Spirit of God

### **Verses 18-39:** Hope in suffering

- Verses 18-27:** We groan in this world of suffering
  - Verse 18:** Our future glory is greater than all our suffering
  - Verses 19-22:** All creation groans with us
  - Verses 23-25:** We hope for the redemption of our bodies
  - Verses 26-27:** Our spirits groan to God for deliverance
- Verses 28-39:** We hope because God works for our eternal good
  - Verses 28-30:** We hope because God purposes eternal good for those who love Him
  - Verses 31-34:** We hope because God justifies so that no one can condemn
  - Verses 35-39:** We hope because nothing can separate us from God's love

There are many exegetical questions that are not easily resolved in Romans 8, yet most Bible students agree that this is one of the most uplifting chapters in the Bible. This is “the chapter beginning with

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas 67.

*no condemnation*, and ending with *no separation!*<sup>2</sup> It also begins and ends “in Christ.” The point in time that God places a person “in Christ” Paul defined in 6:3. Although Paul’s use of the word “spirit” is much debated, there is no mistaking the emphasis of life in the spirit. Life in the spirit frees us from condemnation and brings peace, adoption into God’s family, an inheritance from the Lord, hope during trials, assurance that God hears our prayers, God working for our good, and protection from every kind of danger. In summary, God gives life to those in Christ, not only life to the spirit but to the body as well.

After speaking of the intense inner struggle against sin in Chapter 7, Paul begins Chapter 8 on the glorious theme that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (v. 1). God has set us free from this struggle through the human life and death of His Son (vv. 2-4). We are victorious over sin and death, and the law is fulfilled in us through the offering of Christ as we live spiritual lives (vv. 4-8). God brings life to our spirits and bodies as we allow His Spirit to direct our lives (vv. 9-11). Therefore, we have the obligation to live spiritual lives so that we may avoid death and receive life (vv. 12-13). After all, if we are following God’s Spirit, we will think like children of the Almighty who are fellow heirs with Christ of a great glory (vv. 14-17).

It is true that we must suffer before we are glorified, but that suffering will be trivial compared to the glory God will give us (vv. 17-18). Indeed, we are not alone in our sufferings, but all of creation groans under the penalty of man’s sin and in hope longs for the day when God will liberate it from frustration (vv. 19-22). Our groaning joins all of creation’s as we eagerly but patiently wait in hope for our future inheritance as children of God (vv. 23-25). When we pray, we are sometimes unable to articulate our longings for something better, but God understands our groaning (vv. 26-27). God is always working for our good, for He determined beforehand that He would glorify His children (vv. 28-30). Since God was willing to give His Son that we might be delivered from death, we know that He will also give us whatever is necessary to ensure that we can persevere to the end (vv. 31-39).

Romans 8 draws on many of the teachings already explored in Chapters 1-7, especially in vv. 1-11. It is instructive to notice these previous teachings. Here are just a few examples (unless otherwise noted all quotations are from the NASB-u):

8:1 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.	5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
8:2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.	6:14 For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.
8:2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.	7:24-25 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! . . .
8:11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.	(?) 6:13 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

As with other chapters in Romans, Calvinists have abused Chapter 8. The doctrines of the imputation of Jesus’ personal righteousness, the impossibility of apostasy, unconditional individual predestination, and other doctrines are doctrines that are antithetical to the truth about eternal life in the spirit. However, the following notes focus more on trying to analyze what the chapter teaches than on refuting

<sup>2</sup> Godet 295.

these doctrines. Also, this outlines gives some of the reasonable alternatives to some of the controversial verses so that the reader can have all sides before him and the resources to exam the arguments offered for each side.

In this chapter, I believe Paul uses the word “spirit” (*pneuma*) in three different ways: the Holy Spirit of God (v. 11), the human spirit (v. 10), an attitude (v. 15). Because Chapter 7 establishes a contrast between the outward and inward man (see especially 7:14, 18, 22, 24), and refers to the outer man as “the flesh” or “the body,” I believe Chapter 8 contrasts “flesh” and “spirit.” Furthermore, it seems more natural to contrast the flesh of man with the spirit of man than the flesh of man with the Spirit of God. Jesus contrasted these two sides of human nature in Matthew 26:41, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Therefore, I believe the text refers to *pneuma* as the Holy Spirit in vv. 1, 14, 16(1), as an attitude or disposition in vv. 9(2-3),15, and as the human spirit in all the rest, namely vv. 2(?), 4-6, 9(1), 10, 13, 16(2), 23(?), 26, 27.<sup>3</sup>

When Paul talks about “the flesh,” he means not merely skin and bones; rather, he is using metonymy so that “the flesh” stands for the passions and desires of the flesh (Galatians 5:24). Those who live after “the flesh” in this chapter are those who live as if this life and its physical elements are all there is. Christians are not to live that way, because the fleshly way of life is sinful and must be put in our past since “our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin” (6:6-7).

This chapter starts with the greatest privilege God gives to those in Christ: freedom from condemnation. Then Paul adds privilege after privilege until the chapter climaxes in the last two verses with the incredible affirmation that nothing in Heaven or on Earth, physical or spiritual, natural or supernatural is “able to separate us from the love of God.” Let us not miss the joy and triumph of this chapter. Indeed, let us celebrate it in our minds and our lives!

## Body:

### Life in the Spirit (verses 1-17)

- I. ***The Law of the Spirit Liberates from Sin and Death (verses 1-4):*** *Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (2) For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. (3) For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, (4) so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

#### A. We have been freed from condemnation (v. 1)

1. **No condemnation in Christ Jesus:** We cannot be condemned for sin because the blood of Christ has washed our sins away. “In Christ Jesus” is a spiritual relationship: Philipians 3:8-9; 1 Thessalonians 4:16. “The contrast is between . . . the ‘I on my own’ of 7.25 and the ‘you are not your own’ of I Cor. 6.19.”<sup>4</sup>
2. **Now:** Chapter 7 left a bleak picture of the human struggle against sin, but now in Christ, we have victory. “Therefore” may go back as far as 1:1, certainly to Chapter 4 or 5. It is important to note that this chapter mainly deals with what God does for Christians now.
3. **But only freedom from death:** 6:23.

#### B. We have been freed from condemnation by the law of the spirit (v. 2)

<sup>3</sup> Verses 2, 23 may refer to the Holy Spirit. See comments on those verses.

<sup>4</sup> Robinson *Wrestling* 93.

1. **What is “the law”?**
  - a. **The principle or rule?** “The law of the spirit” is put in contrast with the principle, rule or “controlling power” of sin and death.<sup>5</sup> “Law” should be interpreted in this verse as “order, rule, pattern, system.”<sup>6</sup>
  - b. **The gospel?** As per 1:16; 3:27.
2. **The law of what spirit?** Is Paul referring primarily to the human spirit in vv. 1-17 or the Holy Spirit? Consider 7:6 and 2 Corinthians 3:6. “Spirit” (*pneuma*) may refer to several things: see notes on v. 4. In v. 2, and even in the whole chapter it may be academic. V. 2 sounds much like John 6:63, but what does “spirit” mean there?
  - a. **The Holy Spirit:** No assumptions should be made on the basis of theology, as Calvinists often do with “spirit.” Many commentators who see the human spirit in later verses nevertheless see the Holy Spirit in v. 2. It is unlikely the Law of the Holy Spirit would be contrasted with the Law of Moses, since He gave both, but “the law of sin and death” is not the Law of Moses but the rule of sin and death. The teaching of Christ was given by the Holy Spirit: John 14:26; 16:13. But it probably refers to “the binding authority of the Spirit.”<sup>7</sup> That is, “the dominating power of the Spirit overcomes the dominating power of the flesh in the lives of Christians.”<sup>8</sup>
  - b. **The human spirit:** As a summary of 7:21-25, “spirit” could refer to the “inner man,” “mind,” or “heart.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, it is synonymous with “the law of my mind” in 7:23. Then it means the principle or authority that gives life to the spirit. Even some very old commentators understood this verse to mean “the law of the mind has delivered me from the law of sin.”<sup>10</sup> This is consistent with its use in 1:9; 2:29.<sup>11</sup> The idea that “spirit” is roughly equivalent to “heart” would fulfill many Old Testament prophecies about the nature of new covenant people.
3. **What does the law of the spirit do?**
  - a. **Gives life:** Only the Law of Christ can bring spiritual life from spiritual death. However, if this is to be interpreted “the Spirit of Life,” i.e., the Spirit Who is life, then the Holy Spirit is the *pneuma* of this verse.<sup>12</sup> However, “life in Christ Jesus” is consistent with the message of the book: 5:17, 21; 6:23. The latter is more likely, producing this dichotomy: the law of the spirit produces life and frees us from the law that produces sin and death.
  - b. **Gives freedom:** Sets us free from the domination of sin and death. Not from guilt only but the instruction and example of Christ emancipate us from a life of sinning. The gospel inspires holy living in a way the Law of Moses could not, thus defeating the law of sin (the flesh’s proclivity toward sin).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Godet 296.

<sup>6</sup> Cottrell 457. Coffman makes an interesting argument, however, that “the law of sin and death” is indeed the Law of Moses. He points out the contrast between 3,000 who died when Moses came down from Sinai (Exodus 32:28) and 3,000 who were saved when Peter preached the first gospel sermon in Acts 2:41 (281).

<sup>7</sup> Moo 507.

<sup>8</sup> Cottrell 458.

<sup>9</sup> Turner 62.

<sup>10</sup> Hodge 250. Hodge notes that Beza and others so interpreted this verse.

<sup>11</sup> In 2:29, “by the Spirit” (NASB-u) is *en pneumatī*, “in spirit” in contrast with *en sarx*, “in flesh.”

<sup>12</sup> See 8:11; Psalm 104:30; Job 33:4; Titus 3:5 for the Holy Spirit as the giver of life.

<sup>13</sup> “The slavery *has* been broken to ‘the law of sin and death’, which means probably *both* the principle or rule of sin and death (in contrast with the rule of the Spirit in verse 2a) *and* the law (the Torah) which leads to sin and death (as in chapter 7 and clearly in verse 3a).” Robinson

### C. We are freed from condemnation through the death of Christ (v. 3)

1. **This was the impossible thing (*adunatos*) for the Law of Moses:** Men did not keep the Law, and the Law could not produce righteousness *in men who broke it*, because the Law had no provision for making a wrong person right.
  - a. **Through no fault of the law: 7:12.** It was not the Law that kept men from perfection but “the flesh.”
  - b. **But because of human weakness:** Paul uses “flesh” to refer to the part of man that seeks sinful pleasure by stimulating the body and/or the man who lives as if life consists only of the physical. Paul uses it much as we use “worldliness” or “materialism.”<sup>14</sup> “The Law points the way to what is right, but frail humanity is tempted and falls, and so the Law’s good counsels come to nothing.”<sup>15</sup> The problem (fault) with the Law is that the people did not keep it: Hebrews 8:7-8.
2. **But God accomplished it**
  - a. **By sending His Son**
    - 1) **In the likeness of sinful flesh:** People are not inherently sinful, but the ubiquity of sin among people makes “sinful flesh” an accurate description of mankind.<sup>16</sup> Or if “sinful” means “subject to the infirmities which sin brought into it,” then “likeness” would be equivalent to “sameness.”<sup>17</sup>
      - a) **In the fullness of humanness:** The word “likeness” does not mean Jesus was less human than we are. Hebrews 2:14-17; 4:15 establish the full humanity of Jesus. “Likeness” emphasizes what He had in common with us not how He was different.<sup>18</sup>
      - b) **But without sin:** If “likeness” is used to show a difference, that difference is not in His nature but because Jesus never sinned. “Sinful flesh” is an accurate description of how mankind acts by choice, but it is not a good description of Christ. But He came in exactly the same flesh (nature) as sinful men have. Jesus came in the flesh with all its possibilities for sin, but flawlessly chose not to sin every time.<sup>19</sup>
    - 2) **For sin:** By giving His sinless body “for sin.” Although “to do away with sin” or “to show how to live without sin in order to condemn sin” (as in the following phrase) make sense, “as an offering” for sins is the most natural interpretation in view of the entire Bible.
  - b. **And thus condemning sin in the flesh:** See v. 1 where we are freed from condemnation. “Condemn” is a judicial term and thus Paul draws the picture of God as the

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<sup>13</sup> *Wrestling* 93.

<sup>14</sup> Robinson *Wrestling* 97.

<sup>15</sup> Sanday and Headlam 192.

<sup>16</sup> F.F. Bruce writes that “before the coming of the Spirit, it was impossible to do the will of God” (Bruce 149). This cannot be true or God is ultimately responsible for having created us in such a way that we could not obey Him or for giving a law we could not obey. However, the NIV’s translation of “flesh” as “sinful nature” if we understand “nature” to be learned or acquired and not inherent then it is only an unfortunate commentary instead of a translation of *sarx*, but not an inaccurate translation. However, because nature will be misconstrued and was no doubt meant to mean “inherent nature” by the translators, it becomes a hindrance to understanding God’s Word.

<sup>17</sup> Hodge 252-53.

<sup>18</sup> Thus, “in the guise of sinful flesh” (*Amplified Bible*) is not only poor translation but poor commentary. See Moo 511-12 for a thorough treatment of the subject.

<sup>19</sup> Godet reached a similar conclusion: “God, by sending His Son, meant to provide a human life in that same flesh under the influence of which we sin so habitually, such that it might complete this dangerous career without sin” (299).

judge pronouncing judgment on sin itself. In every other case, sin has succeeded in condemning men; only Christ lived without sin, thus condemning it.<sup>20</sup>

- 1) **By His atoning sacrifice?** He condemned sin by rendering it powerless to defeat men. The death of Christ is the sentence God the Judge pronounced against sin.
- 2) **By living a sinless life in the flesh?** That is, by living a sinless human life, He showed that man could choose not to allow sin to be Master (cf. Matthew 12:41-42; Hebrews 11:7). By living as a human (without taking advantage of His deity), Christ “declared it [sin—OCM] evil and unworthy of existing in humanity.”<sup>21</sup>
- 3) **A general expression?** The above interpretations are both found in 1 Peter 2:24. So it may be that “the expression is a general one and speaks not only of Christ’s mission to atone for sin but also in virtue of that atonement to destroy its dominion and power over believers.”<sup>22</sup> Sin had ruled over man, but Christ condemned sin for its rule over us and freed men from its power by taking away our sins and thus removing the power of sin to condemn us (v. 4).<sup>23</sup>

**D. Our freedom from condemnation has resulted in the requirements of the law being fulfilled in us (v. 4)**

**1. The requirement of the Law**

- a. **Sinlessness:** The requirement of the Law was sinlessness (cf. James 2:10). Whether “the Law” refers to the Law of Moses or “God’s ‘eternal moral demands’” would not make much difference.<sup>24</sup> God still demands sinlessness, but now even a sinner can become sinless by allowing Jesus to wash away his sins and then walking in the spirit. Sinlessness under Moses could only be attained by perfect works. Sinlessness under Christ comes by perfect faith (cf. James 2:14-26).
- b. **Punishment for sins:** The Law requires punishment for sin which Christ paid and so the requirement is fulfilled in us as “we through faith in [Christ] are acquitted or justified.”<sup>25</sup>

**2. Is fulfilled in Christians:** How? Jesus washes our sins away (v. 3), so that we actually are without sin.<sup>26</sup> This seems better than to say “the just requirements of the Law might be accomplished for us” since the verse says fulfilled “*in us*.”<sup>27</sup>

- a. **Who do not walk according to the flesh:** To believe and live as though there was nothing more important in this life than the gratification of the flesh is the way every animal lives. The things which please the flesh will end in death since they are not permanent. It is each person’s choice to live for the flesh or spirit.
- b. **But walk according to the spirit:** One who so walks, knows that the real goal of life is spiritual and eternal.

<sup>20</sup> Robinson *Wrestling* 94.

<sup>21</sup> Godet 300. See also Lard 245.

<sup>22</sup> Greene 258. Also Lenski 500: It “includes the whole relation of Christ’s mission to sin.”

<sup>23</sup> McGuiggan 234.

<sup>24</sup> Moo 531.

<sup>25</sup> Hamilton 471. Hamilton interprets it “for us.”

<sup>26</sup> This seems to me also to be the meaning of 2 Corinthians 5:21.

<sup>27</sup> Hamilton 472.

- 1) **Is God’s “Spirit” contrasted with human “flesh”?** We must live according to what the Holy Spirit teaches. “The Law” is in the context, so speaking of the new revelation of the Holy Spirit makes sense. The contrast: obey the Holy Spirit instead of our own fleshly desires.<sup>28</sup> That is, living by human values (the flesh) contrasts with living by God’s values (the Spirit).
- 2) **Is human “spirit” contrasted with human “flesh”?** “The flesh” of man contrasts best with “the spirit” of man.<sup>29</sup> Living by the baser, dark, animalistic impulses (flesh) contrasted with living by the higher, godly impulses (spirit) of people created in God’s image who is spirit (John 4:24). “The opposite of ‘flesh’ is ‘spirit’” and in vv. 4-8 is “to be understood in the ethical sense like ‘flesh,’ thus of a spiritual quality (*kata pneuma*, no article).”<sup>30</sup>

E. **Summary of verses 1-4:** We have been saved (v. 1) by the law of the spirit (v. 2) through the death of Christ (v. 3) resulting in the requirements of God being fulfilled (v. 4).

II. ***The Fleshly Mindset Versus the Spiritual Mindset (verses 5-8):*** *For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. (6) For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, (7) because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so (8) and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

A. **The fleshly mindset:** “Flesh” (*sarx*) is found in vv. 1, 3(3), 4, 5(2), 6(2), 7(2), 8, 12 (2), 13 and in 1:3; 2:28; 3:20; 4:1; 6:19; 7:5, 18, 25; 9:3, 5, 8; 11:14; 13:14.

1. **Is according to the flesh (v. 5):** Worldly people look at everything from a worldly perspective. They live according to the flesh. They are worldly. Since “the word speaks of a deliberate setting of one’s mind upon . . . ‘the things of the flesh,’” then the second part of the verse refers to those who deliberately set their minds on God.<sup>31</sup>
2. **Is death (v. 6):** 6:21, 23 shows that “flesh” has close connection with “sin.” The fleshly minded person is even now spiritually dead (cf. 1 Timothy 5:6). Paul’s wording is strong and plain: he equates the fleshly mindset with death.
3. **Is hostile toward God (v. 7):** Every man who sets his mind on sensual desires declares himself an enemy of God (James 4:4). Such a one hates truth and loves darkness; thus, he hates the God who loves truth and hates darkness (John 3:20).
  - a. **Cannot subject itself to the law of God:** “The law of God” is “the demands of God” generally. This does not mean that a wicked man “has no ability to change.”<sup>32</sup> The passage “does not express any opinion about the metaphysical ability of man, or discuss that question at all.”<sup>33</sup> No matter how well we know or even keep certain aspects of God’s law, if our minds are really set on satisfying our fleshly desires, we are not submitting to God’s law. We cannot serve two masters; we cannot have two reasons for living.
  - b. **Cannot please God (v. 8):** “In the flesh” means “living according to the flesh” or “controlled by the flesh” (NBV).

<sup>28</sup> See CEV on this verse. As in 1 Corinthians 5:3-5.

<sup>29</sup> Luther 120; Whiteside 171 and others.

<sup>30</sup> Lenski 503-04. Also see Lard 252.

<sup>31</sup> Greene 260.

<sup>32</sup> Hodge 256.

<sup>33</sup> Barnes 174. Of course, Robert Frew, the editor of Barnes’s commentary on Romans is extremely displeased with Barnes’s exegesis, arguing without proof that every human mind is naturally opposed to God.

- 1) **As long as one persists in such, he cannot please God.** This is similar to Matthew 6:24. For other strong exclusionary statements, see John 8:24; 14:6; Acts 4:12; Hebrews 11:6.
  - 2) **By his life in general:** It does not follow that nothing a sinner does pleases God or that “he can do only what is evil (*before God*).”<sup>34</sup> Examples: an atheist teaches his child to be honest; Cyrus permits the Jews to return to Jerusalem. Yet the person himself “cannot please God.”
- B. **The spiritual mindset:** Such a man has his mind “set” and is not double-minded (James 1:8). Whatever the “spirit” is in v. 5, it also is in v. 6. Paul makes the same contrast in Galatians 5:16-26, but there also we must grapple with identifying the *pneuma*.
1. **Is according to the spirit (v. 5):** Spiritual people look at everything from a spiritual perspective. There may be little practical difference whether *pneuma* refers to the divine or human spirit, for “those who let the Holy Spirit guide them fix their thoughts and affections on things spiritual.”<sup>35</sup> We can control our actions and our thoughts: Philippians 4:8-9.
    - a. **The Holy Spirit?** A contrast between those who set their minds on themselves (flesh) and those who set their minds on God (Spirit, cf. John 4:24).
    - b. **The human spirit?** The parallel in Galatians 5:17 is the “human spirit.” Also see Galatians 6:1. “‘Flesh’ is not a person, and its opposite cannot be the infinite Person.”<sup>36</sup>
  2. **Is life (v. 6):** The spiritual mindset produces life. By saying “is life” Paul shows that the spiritual mindset and life are inseparable. This is spiritual life or eternal life.
  3. **Is peace (v. 6):** There is no conflict between himself and God. He will live now and be forever at peace with himself and God.
- III. ***The Indwelling Spirit Brings Life (verses 9-11):*** *However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. (10) If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. (11) But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.*
- A. **To those who are “in the spirit”:** Paul may use the word “spirit” in this chapter in several ways to stress the importance of the spiritual realm. V. 9 may include three uses: “However, you are not in the flesh, but live with the best interests of *your spirit* in mind, if indeed the *Holy Spirit* of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the *attitude* of Christ, he does not belong to Him.”
1. **You are in the spirit**
    - a. **The Holy Spirit?** Is *pneuma* the Holy Spirit throughout? Would this be “sheer tautology,” or would it be instructive since Paul reverses the subject and object in the two clauses?<sup>37</sup> Thus, we are in the Holy Spirit if the Holy Spirit dwells in us.

<sup>34</sup> Luther 118. See also Barnes 175.

<sup>35</sup> Sanday and Headlam 194-95. The spiritual mindset describes Christians whose “own spirit formerly dead and insensitive, is now instinct with the life with the Spirit of God imparts” (Bruce 149).

<sup>36</sup> Lenski 505.

<sup>37</sup> Wallace, *Commentary* 246. See also Lard 256 and Wallace, *The Mission* 68-74. Both Wallace and Lard claim this “would be sheer tautology.” However, Jesus seems to speak in a similar manner in *John 10:38* (cf. *1 John 4:15*). Also Wallace does not call it tautology when he explains Paul’s use of “Spirit of God dwells in you,” “have the Spirit of Christ,” and “Christ in you” as synonymous terms.

We will outwardly follow the Holy Spirit if we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us inwardly.

- b. **The human spirit?** You do not live to satisfy fleshly desires but to satisfy your spirits. “The Spirit of God” seems to in addition to the initial *pneuma* in this verse. This lends support to translating “human spirit” in previous verses.

## 2. The Spirit of God dwells in you

- a. **The Holy Spirit?** Only those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells are spiritually minded people.
- b. **The attitude, disposition or character?** You are living as people who mind the spirit of man, if indeed you have internalized what God and Christ are all about.<sup>38</sup>

## 3. You have the spirit of Christ

- a. **The Holy Spirit?** Simply “the Spirit of God” renamed.
- b. **The attitude, disposition or character?** The attitude of Christ was to submit to the Father, doing all He was supposed to do: John 4:34.

## 4. You belong to Christ:

We infer from v. 9 that those who do have the spirit of Christ do belong to Him.

## 5. Christ is in you:

Since “Spirit of God dwells in you,” “have the Spirit of Christ,” and “Christ in you” seem to be used here in a roughly synonymous way, a personal indwelling seems unlikely.<sup>39</sup> Also see John 14:23.

## B. God will give life

### 1. God has given your spirit life

#### a. Though the body is dead because of sin

- 1) **Will die physically:** 5:12; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22. All die in consequence of Adam’s sin. The ordinary meaning of *dia* with the accusative is “because of.” “If Christ is in you” is modified by the following two clauses as in NASB-u. Whereas, if Christ is not in you, the body is dead AND spirit is also dead.<sup>40</sup>
- 2) **Is dead to sin:** Similar to the teaching in 6:6-11 where saints are “dead to sin, but alive to God.”<sup>41</sup> The body of a Christian is separated from sin. The part of us that wants to sin is dead but the part of us that wants to engage in righteousness is very much alive. The previous context, the context of the letter, and the verb tense favor this interpretation.

- b. **The spirit is alive because of righteousness:** “Righteousness” may be 1) doing what is right; 2) the righteousness God has revealed in the gospel (1:17); 3) that

<sup>38</sup> That is, God is spirit, and those who would follow Him should live as the essentially spiritual beings they are (cf. John 4:14; 1 Peter 1:14-16). Wallace follows a similar line of reasoning in Commentary 244-245. So agrees Turner 64.

<sup>39</sup> Sanday and Headlam 197.

<sup>40</sup> Consider this parallel: “If you take this medicine, you will have pain but you will get better.” This does not imply that if you do not take the medicine you will not have pain but rather that you will not get better. Lard avers that “*et*” ought to be translated “though” instead of “if” which seems to be the sense conveyed by the NASB-u in translating “*men . . . de*” as “though . . . yet” (258). This answers Wallace (Commentary 34) and Whiteside (174) that “the body is dead because of sin” is modified by “if Christ is in you” and that it therefore cannot refer to physical death of the body.

<sup>41</sup> McGuiggan 239. Stroop also takes this position, stating, “When Christ came into their lives, they died to sin. They ceased to be ruled over and directed by sin and because of righteousness or justification, their spirit or inner being came to live or to control.” See Stroop, Part One 69. So agrees Turner 64.

Christ has made us righteous (justified us); 4) or a very general statement.<sup>42</sup> The third seems best to me.

- 1) **The human spirit:** But the spirit of a Christian lives!
- 2) **The Holy Spirit:** Literally, “the spirit is life.”

## 2. God will give your body life

- a. **So it is alive to righteousness, used to serve God:** The meaning is the same as 6:4-5, 11-14.<sup>43</sup> Our bodies are “reactivated to serve God.”<sup>44</sup> Our bodies, once enslaved to sin, now serve Christ (12:1). See also v. 13 and 2 Corinthians 4:11. Thus, He who has the power to raise Jesus from the dead has the power to lift our lives to godliness, i.e., to empower us to use our bodies to serve Him. In one sense your bodies are currently dead (v. 10) – dead to sin – but in another sense they are alive (v. 11) – alive to God’s will.
- b. **Bodily resurrection:** Future tense verb: “will give life” (v. 11). “Though your body is dead, your spirit is alive and if Jesus’ Spirit dwells in you, your body also will eventually be made alive as well.” In addition to giving eternal life to our spirits (v. 10), in the future He will give eternal life to our bodies as well (v. 11).

IV. ***Duties and Blessings of Being Led by the Spirit of God (Verses 12-17):*** *So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh (13) for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (14) For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (15) For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” (16) The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, (17) and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.*

A. **Duties:** The very words “we are under obligation” (v. 12) speak of free will.

### 1. To the flesh

- a. **Not to live according to it:** We have an obligation, but it is not to the flesh, for that only brings sin and death: vv. 2, 6-8. V. 13 may mean the same as v. 6.
- b. **But to put it to death:** 6:11; Galatians 5:24. “The deeds of the body” is equivalent to “living according to the flesh (v. 5).” The verb “putting to death” implies continuous action (present active indicative).
- c. **In order to avoid spiritual death:** “Brethren” addressed in v. 12 will die spiritually if they live “according to the flesh” (v. 13; cf. vv. 6-8). This shows possibility of apostasy.<sup>45</sup> It is a stubborn Calvinist who can write that every true Christian “will be infallibly prevented from living a fleshly life-style by the Spirit within” him but that this “interpretation in no way mitigates the seriousness of the warning Paul gives here” that if “his readers . . . continue to live by the dictates of the flesh they will certainly die.”<sup>46</sup> Anyone can see that it not only mitigates Paul’s warning but eviscerates it and in fact turns all such warnings into jabberwocky, or worse,

<sup>42</sup> For the view that God has justified us, see Godet 305. Sanday and Headlam say however that righteousness “is also to be taken in a wide sense: it includes all the senses in which righteousness is brought home to man, first imputed, then imparted, then practiced.

<sup>43</sup> Whiteside 175-76.

<sup>44</sup> Turner 64; Stroop, *Part One* 69.

<sup>45</sup> For a brief but powerful refutation of the Calvinist position on this passage see Cottrell 475.

<sup>46</sup> Moo 527-28.

outright deception. Those who live a worldly life often say, “Now this is living!” But Paul says, “No, that is dying!”

2. **To the spirit:** He who neglects the spirit to satisfy the flesh, kills the spirit.
  - a. **To use it to put to death the body:** V. 13 is “in the spirit” (*pneumati*). There is a strong contrast between life and death in this chapter.
    - 1) **The human spirit?** By paying attention to our spirits, we put to death the deeds of the body (v. 13). The contrast of “spirit” is “flesh;” if the latter is human, why not the former?<sup>47</sup> Those who live to the flesh die spiritually and eternally, but those die to the flesh live spiritually and eternally. Lenski argues that *pneumati* is a dative of means and that “we never use God’s Spirit as a means. He uses us as a means, and not we him.”<sup>48</sup>
    - 2) **The Holy Spirit?** Using the power of the Holy Spirit, we put to death the deeds of the body.
  - b. **To be led by God’s Spirit:** The present passive indicative, “are being led” puts the onus on the believer to allow the Spirit to lead him. It is reasonable to conclude that “throughout this chapter Paul writes clearly and always, as here, designates the Spirit in such a way as to distinguish him from ‘spirit’ which is used in a different sense.”<sup>49</sup>

## B. Blessings

1. **Become sons of God:** The reason we will live if we put to death the deeds of the body (v. 13) is that we are children of God (v. 14). Every person who is being led by the Holy Spirit is a child of God.
  - a. **This begins when we are born again:** This is according to the instruction of the Holy Spirit: 1 Peter 1:23; cf. John 3:1-5.
  - b. **But involves the continuous process (present tense) of being led by His Spirit:** Are we conscious of the Holy Spirit’s leading? This is an important question even if this leading does not include “an inward prodding of the conscience, an influence upon the heart, an empowerment of the will to do what we already know is right based on the teaching of Scripture.”<sup>50</sup> Christians surely feel such “an inward prodding” and heart-felt influence even if the Holy Spirit works solely through His Word.
2. **Receive the spirit of adoption (v. 15):** V. 15 refers to an attitude or disposition. Sons of God do not have an attitude of slavery but of adoption.<sup>51</sup> We do not fear death nor life nor anything else (vv. 31-39), not even judgment (v. 34). Aside: disciples of Christ are emotionally involved as children “crying out” to their Father above. Have those who never experience a cry from the heart really received the spirit of adoption?

<sup>47</sup> Sanday and Headlam 202.

<sup>48</sup> Lenski 517-18.

<sup>49</sup> Lenski 520.

<sup>50</sup> Cottrell 479. Actually, Cottrell believes that “the Spirit leads us by taking our hand and giving us inner strength to walk in the paths of righteousness.” He seems to deny that this has any “cognitive meaning” either as the Holy Spirit subjectively revealing things to us or even objectively since he believes this leading is “a prodding of the conscience” in people who “already know what is right based on the teaching of Scripture.”

<sup>51</sup> Another possibility is that the Holy Spirit Whom we have received is not a Spirit of Slavery but a Spirit of Adoption (Lard 264).

3. **Receive the testimony of the Holy Spirit on our behalf (v. 16):** We know that we are indeed children of God because the Holy Spirit testifies along with our spirits about our identity.
  - a. **To whom?**
    - 1) **Our own spirits?** The Holy Spirit testifies along with our spirits to assure us that indeed we are children of God. This seems to me the most likely meaning.
    - 2) **God the Father?** The Holy Spirit witnesses along with our spirit, as testimony to the Father?<sup>52</sup> Why would the Father who knows all need such testimony? It could be simply that that is His role. Why would Paul write this? To give us assurance.
    - 3) **The world?** The world receives this joint testimony as it sees the results (fruit) of the Holy Spirit in our lives and hears us say we are Christians: Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 2:12; 4:16.
  - b. **In what way?** Surely not in a subjective way. What assurance would it be to know that the Holy Spirit whispers something in our hearts along with our own heart? How would we distinguish the two?
    - 1) **By the fruit of the Spirit:** The Holy Spirit does this by producing in the Christian's life the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23; 1 John 2:3). When a person has "love, joy, peace," etc. in his life, he knows and the world knows, that he is a child of God.<sup>53</sup> Yet we only know what the fruit of the Spirit is by the Spirit's Word. So, the Word of God is implied in this verse either way.
    - 2) **By His Word revealing the qualifications of adoption:** The Holy Spirit testifies (as He reveals) in His Word that people who meet certain qualifications are children of God. My spirit says that I have met those qualifications, so the Holy Spirit testifies with my spirit that I am a child of God. Or as v. 15 defines "spirit," "The Holy Spirit gives testimony as to what one must do and be to be a child of God, and our spirit [attitude – OCM] of filial submission shows that we possess the characteristics of sonship."<sup>54</sup>
4. **Become heirs of God:** As children of God, we are heirs of our Father. Jesus' inheritance is certain, so is our's.
  - a. **If we suffer with Him:** As with Christ, we must suffer before we can be glorified (cf. Philippians 2:8-11).
  - b. **We will be glorified with Him:** Restatement of "heirs of God."

### Hope in Suffering (verses 18-39)

- I. ***God Hears Our Groaning (Verses 18-27):*** *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (19) For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. (20) For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope (21) that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (22) For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of*

<sup>52</sup> Cottrell 484.

<sup>53</sup> Barnes 180.

<sup>54</sup> Whiteside 180.

*childbirth together until now. (23) And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. (24) For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? (25) But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. (26) In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; (27) and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*

A. **God will reveal glory toward us (v. 18):** 2 Corinthians 4:17. God will reveal this glory toward (*eis*) us not “in us” (KJV, NIV) or merely “to us” (NASB-u). When put on the balances, this glory will far outweigh any and all suffering Christians endure for Christ’s sake or simply because of being human in a fallen world.

1. **Creation longs for that day (v. 19):** The passage starts on a positive note.<sup>55</sup> “Anxious longing” etymologically refers to stretching out the head, calling to mind “the image of a person in an airport ‘craning his neck’ to see just as soon as possible a returning loved one who has been gone for a long time.”<sup>56</sup>
  - a. **Because it was subjected to futility (v. 20):** God cursed it when man sinned, or because of Adam it became subjected to frustration.
  - b. **But it still has hope (v. 20):** God did not leave it without hope of returning to its pristine state.
  - c. **That it might also be set free**
    - 1) **From frustration (v. 20):** It is frustrated because it is subjected to entropy.
    - 2) **From corruption (vv. 21-22):** Everything decays.
    - 3) **Sharing the glory of God’s children (v. 21):** When Christians are freed from corruption and given glory, God will give creation the same.
2. **And we long for that day (v. 23)**
  - a. **Though we have the first fruits of the spirit:** What we have now received is only a small down payment: Acts 2:38; 5:32; Romans 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:14; James 1:18. We groan because we have a taste but know there is so much more: 2 Corinthians 5:1ff.
  - b. **We groan in eager anticipation:** Does not even the strongest Christian, the most trusting saint, experience this groaning in his body? No doubt, “we often groan inwardly, even when others do not suspect it, and when they hear us proclaiming salvation.”<sup>57</sup>
    - 1) **For the full benefits of our adoption:** We are already children of God, but we are still waiting for our full adoption into the eternal kingdom. By synecdoche, the adoption we wait for is the full inheritance of our adoption.<sup>58</sup>
    - 2) **For the redemption of our bodies:** Our spirits are renewed but we are still waiting for our corruptible bodies to be changed into incorruptible bodies: 1 Corinthians 15:42, 53.

<sup>55</sup> Barclay 110-11 has a wonderful description of Paul’s optimism.

<sup>56</sup> Moo 550.

<sup>57</sup> Godet 318.

<sup>58</sup> Cottrell 492-94.

**B. God has saved us in hope (vv. 24-25)**

1. **For that which we do not yet fully possess (v. 24):** When we were saved from condemnation, we received the hope of eternal salvation, including the redemption of our bodies (v. 23). While all creation groans, this hope offers Christians solace though we also “groan within ourselves” (v. 23).
2. **But for which we persevere (v. 25):** True hope produces “perseverance.” We will persevere through “the sufferings of this present time” (v. 18) if we do not lose hope. We must suffer patiently, waiting on the Lord. Waiting is not passive but an eager waiting.

**C. God understands our prayers of groaning (vv. 26-27):** God understands our groaning: Psalm 38:9.

1. **When we do not know how to word our prayers (v. 26):** When the mind cannot tell the tongue what to say—perhaps in the depth of grief when prayer is natural but words are most difficult to find—the spirit pours itself out to God. Even knowing the Scriptures well, we may struggle with words.<sup>59</sup>
2. **The spirit intercedes with deep groanings (v. 26)**
  - a. **The Holy Spirit?** The mechanics of how He does it is not revealed, but this is another way the Holy Spirit helps us (cf. vv. 14, 16). We groan, creation groans, and God in His sympathy groans with us. He longs for us to be released from the suffering and mortality of this life as well.
    - 1) **The Holy Spirit intercedes while we groan:** “The Holy Spirit does not and cannot groan; these groans are ours.”<sup>60</sup>
    - 2) **Or the Holy Spirit’s intercessory groanings cannot be expressed in human words.** But God understands what the Holy Spirit says on our behalf.<sup>61</sup>
    - 3) **The Holy Spirit (“He who searches the hearts”) knows the mind of our spirits (v. 27):** He knows because He intercedes for us.<sup>62</sup> V. 26 then refers to the Holy Spirit twice.
  - b. **Our spirits?** The spiritual mind helps a person overcome the weaknesses of the flesh (cf. 6:19). The fleshly, weak side of man does not know how to pray but the spiritual side of man does (1 Corinthians 2:11). If *pneuma* means the Holy Spirit, the “groaning” appears to be His, but it makes more sense to speak of human groanings as “too deep for words.” And there are other problems with the Holy Spirit interpretation.<sup>63</sup> No other passage suggests that the Holy Spirit reveals the thoughts and feelings of man to God. Rather, the Holy Spirit’s role “to reveal and confirm God’s will and mind to man.”<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 14:14-15 con-

<sup>59</sup> See [John 12:27-28](#). Was Jesus struggling here? Also consider [2 Corinthians 12:7-9](#).

<sup>60</sup> Lenski 547.

<sup>61</sup> Hamilton 511; Cottrell 498.

<sup>62</sup> Wallace, [Commentary](#) 36.

<sup>63</sup> “To make the Spirit here [in v. 27—OCM] mean the Holy Spirit would have the Holy Spirit searching his own mind. And to make it mean that God knows the mind of the Holy Spirit could have no point . . . It would amount to saying that God knows his own spirit.” Therefore, “the entire context is based on the initial statement: ‘for we know not how to pray as we ought.’ The infirmity mentioned has reference to the inability of the mind to put yearnings into words. But He who searches the heart knows the mind of the spirit—the yearnings and desires which it is unable to express—and in this way the spirit, our own spirit, helpeth our infirmity when He who searches the heart knows what is *the mind* of the spirit” (Wallace, [Commentary](#) 247-48). See 1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Kings 8:39; Psalms 7:9; 17:3; Proverbs 20:27; Matthew 26:41; Acts 1:24; 15:8; 1 Corinthians 2:11; Revelation 2:23. However, the argument is not conclusive, because the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three separate persons. There is no reason to suppose that each of these knows everything in the “mind” of the others at all times. So, “that God knows his own spirit” may well have meaning. Also, sometimes Scripture does indeed state the obvious.

<sup>64</sup> Dye, [Does the Spirit Intercede](#) 2. See [John 14:26](#); [16:13-15](#); [1 Corinthians 2:9-13](#); [Ephesians 3:1-5](#).

firms that it is our spirit that prays to God not the Holy Spirit praying to God for us.

3. **Jesus understands the groaning of our spirits (v. 27):** Refers to our groaning as continuation of v. 23.
  - a. **As our Intercessor (v. 27):** God is the great Heart-knower (Acts 1:24; Jeremiah 17:10), but Christ is the heart-knower in Revelation 2:23. Scripture specifies this as Jesus' role in v. 34; Isaiah 53:12; Hebrews 7:25; 1 Timothy 2:5. In all of these passages, *entugxano* is used, but in v. 26, *huperentugxano* is used, indicating it is our own spirit interceding and Jesus interceding (*entugxano*) in v. 27. "I say, then, the (human) spirit itself speaks for us to God; it intercedes for our deliverance by groans which cannot be expressed in words. For although our spirit groans under these bodily afflictions and infirmities, and cannot give utterance to its own desires; yet when patiently bearing these trials, its groans have a meaning which is understood. Yes, he who searches the heart knows what these groans mean."<sup>65</sup> Who better to understand the groaning of the human spirit? It is unlikely that Christ, who lived on Earth as a man, needs the Holy Spirit to interpret the groanings or prayers of the saints.<sup>66</sup>
  - b. **Thus, our groaning prayers are heard and understood (v. 27):** God knows the groaning of our spirits when we are unable to put our pain and confusion into words.

## II. Excursus: What is the "Creation" of Verses 19-22

### A. Christians?

#### 1. Objections

- a. **This seems unnatural and forced:** "Creation" seems to be used literally, and the "subjection" of creation refers "clearly to Gen. 3:17."<sup>67</sup>
- b. **"The creation" and "the sons of God" appear to be different:** In v. 19 the creation seems to be waiting for something to happen to something apart from itself. V. 23 seems to contrast Christians with "the creation" of vv. 19-22.

2. **Arguments:** V. 22 may change the subject to all of mankind ("the whole creation") contrasted with Christians again in v. 23. Or v. 23 may refer to the apostles or the early Christians.<sup>68</sup> Or perhaps "the whole creation" brings in the physical creation for the first time. Thus, even Christians are not set free from the corruption of the body and physical life in general. If we should be inclined to complain about this, we should keep in mind that "*it is just the condition of everything.*" Thus, "We are not the only one's suffering, but all of creation suffers as well."<sup>69</sup>

- a. **It is used in Scripture in this way:** It refers to Christians who are "created in Christ Jesus" or new creatures: Ephesians 2:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15.<sup>70</sup>
- b. **Christians long for an end to suffering:** Christians suffer much and live in a corrupted body, so they anxiously long for the day when they will be set free: 1 Cor-

<sup>65</sup> Campbell 111.

<sup>66</sup> Though, Cottrell notes that this could merely be "a matter . . . of choice," that is, the Holy Spirit's role (498).

<sup>67</sup> Robinson *Wrestling* 102.

<sup>68</sup> But why should the apostles as a group suddenly be thrust into this context?

<sup>69</sup> Barnes 186.

<sup>70</sup> Barnes 182-84.

inthians 1:7; Galatians 5:5. The “futility” or “frustration” (v. 20) that saints experience is the corruptible body and the temptations of “the flesh.” Christians are spiritually free, and especially long for complete freedom from the constraints and suffering of our present bodies, because we know such a reality lies ahead: Philippians 1:23.

## B. Mankind?

### 1. Objections

- a. **Sinners have no hope to “be set free from slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God”:** V. 21. Hope involves expectation which sinners do not have.<sup>71</sup>
- b. **Why bring up all of mankind in this connection?** That is, what relevancy does the suffering of sinners have to the suffering of Christian?

### 2. Arguments

- a. **It is used in Scripture in this way:** As in Mark 16:15; Colossians 1:23.<sup>72</sup>
- b. **All men long for freedom, but only saints will receive it:** All men long for immortality which will be revealed at the glorification of the sons of God.<sup>73</sup>
- c. **The physical creation does not have a will:** It refers to mankind in general because that which involves the will “could only apply to men.”<sup>74</sup>

## A. The physical creation?

### 1. Objections

- a. **Inanimate objects do not feel anything:** The creation is something that has a “will” for Paul speaks of it as being “unwilling” (v. 20).
- b. **That all the physical creation groans is of no comfort to Christians**
- c. **2 Peter 3:10 eliminates such a conclusion?** How can it be so that the physical Creation will experience “the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (v. 21)? Such an interpretation would raise new questions about a host of passages: e.g., Matthew 5:5; Acts 3:21; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21:1; 22:3.

2. **Arguments:** That saints might dwell upon a new, rejuvenated Earth should not be that disconcerting. Everything was perfect in Eden and the first couple enjoyed full fellowship with God.

- d. **This is the usual and most natural sense of the word:** God will return the Earth to the state of perfection it had before the Fall<sup>75</sup> Genesis 1 implies that there was nothing inherently evil or corruptible in God’s original creation. However, when man sinned, God cursed all of creation as part of man’s punishment that produced an antagonistic relationship between man and his world which had previously not

<sup>71</sup> When speaking of the hope Christians have, Coffman says it is “more than a mere wish . . . it is a valid claim” (310). Why then does not hope mean the same thing when referring to “creation” in v. 20? And if it means the same thing, how can all mankind have a valid claim to eternal life?

<sup>72</sup> Coffman 302. However, it will not suffice to state, as Coffman does, that there is no good reason why “creation” cannot be interpreted as “mankind” just because it is so used elsewhere.

<sup>73</sup> Coffman 303-05.

<sup>74</sup> Stroop, *Part Two* 5. The answer is that Paul is using personification.

<sup>75</sup> For a good overview of this view see Bruce 160-62.

existed.<sup>76</sup> The physical creation (figuratively) hopes that God will set it free from all the curses imposed upon it since Adam's sin (v. 21). The creation had no say in the matter (though man did), but God cursed it while also giving it hope for a better tomorrow. "Futility" (NASB-u) is better understood as "frustration" (NIV). Creation is frustrated because it is not what God made it to be. The personified physical creation longs for perfection just as humans do. In the future, the temporary reign of entropy in the universe will end.

- e. **Paul is using personification:** Using personification, "creation" comes alive and has a will of its own (v. 20). "Not willingly" speaks of the physical creation in contrast with mankind who willingly chose to forfeit perfection in Eden. All of creation longs for the day when God will lift the curses placed upon it because of the fall of man (cf. Genesis 3:17; cf. Isaiah 24:5-7). See also Isaiah 35:1; Jeremiah 4:28; 12:4, 11; Psalm 96:12. Personification could be used without denying the physical universe will be destroyed: that is, Paul employs the language of the prophets (e.g., Isaiah 55:12; Psalm 98:8) without intending for any of it to be taken literally. However, this passage seems much more descriptive and detailed than simple personification would suggest. It would almost be a fable and fables are rare in Scripture.
- f. **Paul encourages us not to focus on our individual suffering:** "Do not occupy your mind exclusively with the little suffering which you individually endure but see this vast creature world groaning, and we with it, but having all its hope centered in us as the sons of God, centered upon us and on our deliverance. This is a mightier thing than the deliverance of us Christians only; and the more we see its vast proportions and the way in which God has bound up the whole creature world with us, his sons, the truer, surer, greater our own hope and assurance will become."<sup>77</sup> As all of physical looks forward to a better state of existence, so Christians may in faith and hope also look forward to an exalted existence.
- g. **There is some other explanation of 2 Peter 3:10:** If 2 Peter 3:10 means the physical elements of this world will be completely destroyed, it is difficult (though not impossible, see above) to reconcile this passage to physical creation. But perhaps there is another explanation of that passage.<sup>78</sup> Isaiah 65:17-18 might indicate a national judgment is meant.
- h. **Paul uses creation (*ktisis*) in this way in Romans:** 1:20, 25; 8:39. And is v. 22 an ironic use of "childbirth" as part of the original curse?<sup>79</sup> Paul argued earlier that Adam brought sin into the world (5:12). Now he argues that creation fell into "decay through man's sin" and so "it can only be freed through man's redemption."<sup>80</sup> Consider also Acts 3:21; Colossians 1:19-20; Ephesians 1:10.
- i. **Paul brings up Christians in addition to "creation" (v. 23):** V. 23 is clearly in contrast with v. 22 if not with vv. 19-22.

II. ***We Hope Because God Works for Our Eternal Good (Verses 28-39):*** *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called ac-*

<sup>76</sup> Cottrell thinks this is because "man's first sin . . . included an attempt to manipulate the creation and to misuse it for vainglorious purposes" (488).

<sup>77</sup> Lenski 529.

<sup>78</sup> Dawson; McGuiggan 256. Here McGuiggan briefly suggests that the destruction is "God's judgment on the Jewish world." He does not believe we will live on the rejuvenated earth of Romans 8, however.

<sup>79</sup> Cottrell 491.

<sup>80</sup> Robinson Wrestling 102.

according to His purpose. (29) For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; (30) and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (31) What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? (32) He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? (33) Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; (34) who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. (35) Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (36) Just as it is written, "For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." (37) But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. (38) For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, (39) nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

A. **Introduction:** Here are three reasons for our hope.

3. **Because God purposes eternal good for those who love Him (vv. 28-30)**

a. **All things currently work together for good (v. 28)**

1) **What are the "all things"?**

a) **Everything that happens to the faithful?** Paul is giving a reason for Christian optimism and confidence by referring to a great general principle. That is, the disciple of Christ should never despair regardless of suffering and helplessness because God will make everything work together for good. This includes suffering and the plan of salvation, but does not limit "all things" in any way except to limit it to those who love God. This does not mean we should attribute to God such things as the treachery of Joseph's brothers, for "Paul does not say that God *causes* all these circumstances, but that he causes good to *come out of* them."<sup>81</sup>

1] **Including a disciple's sins:** "There is NO THING that cannot be turned to your good and God's glory if you continue to love the Master."<sup>82</sup> Paul has already dealt with any thought that "perhaps we should sin more that God might bring about more good" or "then it does not much matter what we do" in Chapter 6.

2] **Excluding a disciple's sins:** A disciple's sins are excluded from "all things" by the phrase "to those who love God." God will cause everything that might happen to us while we are faithfully serving Him to work out for our good. When we sin, we are neither loving the Lord nor acting "according to His purpose."

b) **Including suffering?** Suffering is a main theme both before and after this verse. Suffering alone does not produce good, but when combined with hope, prayer, providence, and the eternal plan of God, all this works together to bring about good for us. But suffering often destroys sinners, because the other ingredients are not present to work together for good.

<sup>81</sup> Cottrell 500.

<sup>82</sup> McGuigan 261.

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- 1] **Objection:** Does God really cause a tragedy like a parent's loss of a small child or a small child's loss of a parent to work for that person's good? Tragedies are not part of God's way of working out our ultimate, eternal good. If a young boy loses his father, does that really work out for his good? Is it not rather something to be overcome? Is it not a disadvantage the victim must conquer as a great evil?
  - 2] **Answer:** It is not the death by itself that works for good, but the strength God provides for the bereaved, the endurance gained, the faith displayed, the grace given and the encouragement of fellow saints that results in good. A boy losing his father may, when he is grown, find some motivation in that tragedy to adopt children who need fathers. Or it may cause his mother to turn to God. Of course, God adds to the mix grace and providence. Joseph and Jesus provide good examples of God bringing good out of evil that befalls men. This teaching is a decisive blow against our enemies and the ultimate comfort for us: God will turn even the evil intentions of our enemies into good! Praise be to God!
- c) **God's work in salvation only?** God's foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification work for good.<sup>83</sup> This is an assurance that God works for our salvation. Paul defines "all things" vv. 29-30, and elaborates further in vv. 31-32. It is the same "all things" as v. 32: all we need to obtain eternal life. It must be taken in the context of what Romans says God has done to secure our salvation.<sup>84</sup> Chapter 8 provides quite a list of things God does to work for our eternal good.<sup>85</sup>
- 2) **How do they work?**
    - a) **They work together:** Suffering by itself does not produce good, nor does daily Bible reading by itself. But when we combine all things together, they will work to the benefit of the Christian, because "all things" includes God's providential hand.
    - b) **For eternal good:** Not for pleasure. The good God brings about includes everything that contributes to or is a part of spiritual life.
  - 3) **To whom is this promise made?**
    - a) **To those who love God:** The promise is limited. God may bless wicked men, but His blessings do not work for their ultimate good because they misuse His blessings. But we should not interpret this to mean that as soon as some evil befalls us, something good instantly happens but rather that "all things *working together* will *ultimately* produce good," though Paul does not say "necessarily for us personally or even in our own lifetimes."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Wallace, *Commentary* 37: "The working of all things of the plan—scheme of redemption. Not all things that happen to anyone."

<sup>84</sup> Dye "All Things" 89.

<sup>85</sup> "The law of the spirit of life" (v. 2); sending His Son as an offering for sin (v. 3); giving spiritual life (v. 10); promising the resurrection (v. 11); the leading of the Holy Spirit (v. 14); adoption into God's family (v. 15); the testimony of the Holy Spirit (v. 16); a future inheritance (v. 17); a future glory (v. 18); hope (v. 24); hearing our prayers (vv. 26-27); intercession of Christ (v. 27); foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justifying, glorifying (vv. 29-30); delivering His own Son for us (v. 32); protection against all evil (vv. 35-39).

<sup>86</sup> Cottrell 500.

- b) **To those who are called according to His purpose:** A restatement of “those who love the Lord”? God may or may not bring good out of what befalls the wicked, but He will assuredly bring good out of what befalls the righteous. “God in his providence causes all that befalls Christians to work together for their benefit because [*kata*] they are in harmony with his purpose in their obedience to his will . . . Therefore, it is in accordance to [*kata*] his purpose.”<sup>87</sup> God accomplished salvation according to His own plans, and He works all things out, even the suffering we must endure, according to His purpose for our lives. His purpose for our lives includes our good works (Ephesians 2:10), but is much broader: it is “to gather a family of believers who will love him as their heavenly Father and glorify him forever, and whom he can love and bless as his own children.”<sup>88</sup> Thus, God’s purpose includes both this life and eternity, both what He does for His children and what they do to honor Him.
- b. **God works for our salvation from eternity to eternity (vv. 29-30):** Christians should have confidence that their salvation will endure the suffering and vagaries of this life. God so designed salvation that His people would find strength to overcome.
- 1) **Conformed to the image of image of God’s Son:** Those who trust in God are predestined to overcome just as our elder Brother Jesus overcame! “This predestination was to the end of being conformed to the image of his Son.”<sup>89</sup> When we resemble Christ spiritually, we are the predestined ones. Thus vv. 29-30 speaks of God’s plan of salvation on a continuum. Firstborn may refer to rank (cf. Exodus 4:22; Psalm 89:27). Or this conformity may have primary reference to our suffering as He suffered, thus sharing in His suffering. Or “the image” could refer to what God will do in changing our bodies on the last day (Philippians 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:49)?<sup>90</sup> If so, firstborn refers to Jesus being the firstborn from the dead as in Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5; Acts 26:23; 1 Corinthians 15:20.<sup>91</sup> If this view is true, Paul skips from predestination to the final glorification, going back in v. 30 to fill in the gap somewhat.<sup>92</sup>
- 2) **To our glorification:** Is glorification present or future? The verbs in v. 30 are all aorist (past tense). They were all in the mind of God in the past, though there is still a future glorification for saints. This could imitate “the Hebrew use of the ‘prophetic past’, by which a predicted event is marked out as so certain of fulfillment that it is described as though it had already taken place.”<sup>93</sup> However, God also glorifies us now (cf. 9:4, 23). He has called us into His own kingdom.
4. **Because God justifies so that no one can condemn (vv. 31-34)**
- a. **No one can defeat us or bring a charge against us (vv. 31, 33):** How far back does Paul go with “these things” (v. 31)? It could be vv. 28-30, v. 17b-30 or perhaps even v. 1 or 5:1 or even 1:1.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Hamilton 516. See 2 Timothy 1:9; Ephesians 3:11.

<sup>88</sup> Cottrell 501.

<sup>89</sup> Hamilton 518.

<sup>90</sup> Hamilton 518.

<sup>91</sup> Cottrell 503.

<sup>92</sup> Sanday-Headlam 218.

<sup>93</sup> Bruce 168.

<sup>94</sup> Moo 580-81; Cottrell 515. Moo argues that Paul refers to Chapters 5-8; Cottrell that it summarizes the entire letter.

- b. **Because God is for us (v. 31):** The phrase “God is for us” is a good summary of the entire plan of salvation. No one and nothing can overcome us as long as God is on our side. We suffer so that we groan deeply within, yet we will overcome! See Psalm 118:6 and Isaiah 50:7-9.
- 1) **He will give us everything necessary (v. 32):** Everything good comes from God (James 1:17), but probably Paul had in mind spiritual blessings (cf. 2 Peter 1:3). Or perhaps “all things” needed to work together for our good (cf. v. 28). But spiritual blessings seem to be the context: since God gave His Son, the most sacrificial gift possible, He will not withhold from us lesser gifts we will need to persevere (cf. Romans 5:9)? E.g., He will protect us from condemnation (vv. 33-34) and from everything that might separate us from the love of Christ (vv. 35-39). God bestows “all things” “with Him.”
  - 2) **He has justified us (v. 33):** Enemies will accuse us, but the charges won’t stick. (Just call us the Teflon people!) Calvinists invent many ways to show that the present active indicative of “justifies” cannot really mean continuous action, for it would put some of their tenets in danger, but that is the clear import of the verb.<sup>95</sup>
  - 3) **He delivered His own Son for us (v. 32):** Because God *gave us His Son*, we know that He will give us more *through His Son*. Will God hold anything of spiritual value back from us? Inconceivable! God went beyond Abraham’s “not sparing” (Genesis 22:12, LXX) and also “delivered Him over” to wicked men to crucify.
- c. **And Jesus has secured our salvation (v. 34):** What is it about Jesus that assures our acquittal in the eternal court of justice? 1) Jesus’ death; 2) Jesus’ resurrection; 3) Jesus’ ascension; 4) Jesus’ (current) intercession for us as our High Priest sitting at God’s right hand.
5. **Because nothing can separate us from God’s love (vv. 35-39):** Here the chapter reaches its crescendo. By causing us physical and emotional distress and pain, our Enemy constantly attempts to cause us to doubt that God still loves us. But we will not be convinced. Who would know better than Paul (2 Corinthians 11:26-27; 12:10)? In modern terminology, we are “hyper-victors” (*hupernikomen*). Paul covers all the bases in the last two verses of this chapter. We need to be “convinced” beyond doubt that neither the threat of death nor death itself; nor anything life throws at us nor even the promise of life in exchange for renouncing Christ nor the glittering appeal of earthly life and the desire to hold on to it; nor any spiritual being; nor any spiritual or earthly government; nor anything that exists in the present or will ever exist; nor any power of any kind can separate us from God’s love. When Scripture speaks of external enemies, it speaks the language of victory.<sup>96</sup> When God’s Word speaks of internal battles, we are warned of apostasy: e.g., Hebrews 2:1-3; 6:1-6; Galatians 5:4.

## B. Conclusion:

1. There is no condemnation to those whose minds are set on spiritual things. God gives us everything we need to live spiritually, and now we must follow the lead of the Holy Spirit even through times of suffering. As we continue to starve the flesh and feed the spirit, we look to God who has adopted us into His family. We cry for help and all creation cries with us. Often we cannot express our anguish in human language, but God

<sup>95</sup> For some examples of how Calvinists attempt to find some alternative use of the present active tense, see Moo 584.

<sup>96</sup> Yet it is unnatural to conclude that “any other created thing” includes the disciple himself (Moo 589).

understands and causes all things to work together for good. When powerful enemies attack, our God is there to protect us and give us everything we need to overcome.

6. Does the security God provides provoke you to bravery? It should! Nothing that exists, neither earthly powers or “spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” can separate us from the love of God in Christ. God’s love is “in Christ Jesus” Who alone brings us to the Father. Paul affirms that we are secure in Christ from anything that threatens in life or death, material or spiritual, present or past, high or low.

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### Appendix Paraphrase of Romans 8

(1) Although sin is a powerful force and the Law of Moses cannot free us from its power (Ch. 7) God has freed us from the condemnation of sin because we are in Christ Jesus. (2) For the spiritual rule and power of Christ Jesus gives life to your spirits and has set you free from the rule and power of sin and of death which had separated you from God. (3) The Law of Moses could not set anyone free from sin and death because people sinned, and when they sinned, the Law could not save them. The Law could only declare righteous those who kept it perfectly. But God did what the Law could not, by sending His own Son to live just like sinful human beings but without himself sinning and to die as a human being as an offering for our sins. By living a sinless human life and by dying on the cross, Jesus pronounced His condemnation against human sin and took away the power of sin over people's lives and its power to condemn men eternally. (4) God did this so that He could forgive all our sins and we could be righteous as the Law required. When we refuse to live fleshly lives but instead live spiritual lives, we are righteous because any sins we have committed are taken away by the sacrifice of Christ.

(5) After all, worldly people look at everything from a fleshly perspective, but spiritual people look at everything from a spiritual perspective. Fleshly people only live for the temporary pleasures of life while spiritual people pay attention to eternal matters. (6) And fleshly-mindedness results in separation from God, but spiritual-mindedness results in fellowship and peace with God, (7) because the fleshly mindset is hostile toward God; for the person whose main goal is fleshly gratification is not trying to follow the law of God. In fact, as long as a person's mind is set on fleshly lusts, he cannot follow God's law. (8) Therefore, fleshly-minded people cannot please God.

(9) However, you are not fleshly-minded but spiritually-minded, that is, if the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if you do not have the same spiritually-minded attitude and disposition of Christ, you

do not belong to Him. (10) Because Christ is in you, your body is dead to sin, it no longer an instrument of sin. However, your spirit is alive because of the righteousness Christ gives you through His death on the cross. (11) And since the Holy Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give spiritual life to your bodies as well as your spirits so that your bodies are instruments of righteousness because Holy Spirit has transformed your lives.

(12) So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to our bodies, to live to gratify our senses, (13) for if you are living to satisfy your fleshly desires, you must be separated from God; but if your spirit is controlling your fleshly desires, you will have spiritual life in fellowship with God. (14) For everyone who allows the Holy Spirit of God to control their lives, these are sons of God. (15) For you have not received the disposition of a slave who is always afraid of his master, but you have received the disposition of a son adopted into the full privileges of the family of God, causing you to cry out, "Abba! Father!" (16) The Holy Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit, giving us objective assurance that we are children of God, (17) and if children, heirs also, heirs of God's blessings and joint heirs with Christ. But to truly be God's children and heirs of His eternal blessings, including the ultimate glorification of our bodies with Christ, we must first suffer with our Savior.

(18) For in my thinking, whatever we suffer now will pale into insignificance when God bestows upon us the glory of eternal life.

(19) For the physical creation cranes its neck in great anticipation of the day when the final, ultimate glory of the sons of God finally comes to fruition. (20) For God subjected the physical creation to frustration, though it was innocent, as part of the penalty for Adam's sin. But God subjected it in hope (21) that He would one day set free the creation itself from its state of corruption and imperfection and restore it to its pristine state just as the children of God on that day will be granted the freedom of glory. (22) For we know that the whole creation groans together and suffers the pains of childbirth today as it has since the sin of Adam.

(23) Not only does all of the physical creation groan, but we ourselves as the children of God also groan. We groan because we enjoy the first spiritual blessings of salvation, which makes us long for our final inheritance as sons of God, that is, the resurrection and transformation of our bodies. (24) For when God saved us, He gave us hope for our resurrection to eternal life. But we do not yet have the final glorification of our bodies. If we did, we would not call it "hope," because we only hope for what we do not yet possess. (25) But we must persevere under all trials while we wait for this hope of glorification to be realized.

(26) As we suffer along with all creation, we often cannot find the right words when we pray. But, because we are spiritually-minded people, our spirits help our inability to properly word our prayers by interceding for us with groanings too deep for words. (27) Christ, who searches the hearts, knows the meaning of the groaning of our spirits, because He intercedes for us as God planned.

(28) And we know that although we have so much trouble in this life, God causes all things to work together to accomplish ultimate good in the lives of those who love Him and who are answering His call to carry out His purpose. (29) We know that God works to bring about good in our lives because God decided beforehand that all who seek Him will conform to the example of His Son Jesus Christ. In this way, Jesus became preeminent among many sons of God, for He is the model to which all the others conform. (30) Those whom God predetermined would be like His Son, He also called through His gospel; and those who answered His call, He also made righteous by forgiving their sins; and these whom He made righteous, He also decided to ultimately glorify.

(31) What can we say about all these things God has done for us? Must we not conclude that if God is for us, no one can effectively oppose us? (32) God, like Abraham, did not spare His own Son, but did even more than Abraham by delivering Him over to wicked men to brutally kill. Since God did this to save us from our sins, will He not also freely give us all things because we are joint-heirs with His Son?

(33) Who can possibly make an accusation that would condemn God's chosen people? No one can, because God justifies us Himself. (34) Or what individual can judge us guilty? There is no judge but Christ Jesus who died, and, more importantly, was raised. The one and only Judge of men now sits in a place of spiritual authority at the right hand of God. In this place of authority, Jesus now intercedes for us.

(35) Who will separate us from the love Christ has for us? Will inward or outward trials, or persecution for His name's sake, or famine, or nakedness, or danger of any kind, or martyrdom? (36) For indeed it happens to us just as Isaiah said, "For Your sake, O God, we are being put to death all day long; We were treated as if we are no more valuable than sheep to be led off to the slaughterhouse." (37) But even in the midst of terrible suffering, we are hyper-victors through the power of Christ who loved us. (38) For I am convinced that neither the power of death, nor the trials of life, nor spiritual beings, nor earthly rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor any kind of power, (39) nor any high and mighty thing, nor any low and terrible thing, nor anything that exists, will be able to separate us from the love which God has for us who are faithful to Christ Jesus our Lord.